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http://www.kokomotribune.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-gun-safety-is-essential/article_535033b2-63b9-11e4-add3-577d20825da6.html

Editorial: Gun safety is essential

Heartbreaking was the only word to describe what happened to 9-month-old Jacob Ryan Hambaugh Oct. 22. He was accidentally shot by his father, 31-year-old John W. Hambaugh III, of Kokomo.

“Police reported Hambaugh was seated in the kitchen area of [his] Timbernest Townhomes apartment, where he was preparing to clean his handgun,” Tribune writer Mike Fletcher reported Oct. 24. “When Hambaugh attempted to disassemble the gun, a round inadvertently left in the handgun discharged. The bullet entered the inside of Hambaugh’s left thigh and went through to strike the child in the head.”

After being transported to Riley Hospital for Children Oct. 22, Jacob died Oct. 24.

Then, Oct. 28, a similar mishap made national headlines.

“Former baseball star Jose Canseco is undergoing surgery after he accidentally nearly shot his finger off in his Las Vegas home Tuesday night, his fiancée Leila Knight told the Los Angeles Times,” wrote LA Times reporter Ryan Parker last week. “The shooting happened about 3 p.m. while Canseco was cleaning his gun at the kitchen table. There was still a round

in the chamber in the handgun because Canseco had recently visited the shooting range, Knight said.”

How many of these scenes play out each year? It’s hard to say. This problem is a difficult one to track, as many of these occurrences are mislabeled and lost in the shuffle.

“There are far more of these innocent victims than official records show,” reported Michael Luo and Mike McIntire in The New York Times Sept. 28, 2013. “Accidental shootings occurred roughly twice as often as the records indicate, because of idiosyncrasies in how such deaths are classified by the authorities.”

Gun advocates should be the most upset about these sorts of incidents. They give a bad name to millions of gun owners who do exercise caution. If you insist on owning a firearm, safe handling is a must. According to the National Rifle Association, the three fundamental rules are:

1. Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction.
2. Always keep your finger off the trigger until you’re ready to shoot.
3. Always keep the gun unloaded until you’re ready to use it.

“Before cleaning your gun, make absolutely sure that it is unloaded,” states the NRA website. “The gun’s action should be open during the cleaning process. Also, be sure that no ammunition is present in the cleaning area.”

When it comes to deadly weapons like firearms, even a moment's inattention can rip families apart forever. These stories are so frustrating because they are so preventable.